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ABSTRACT

An approach to supervision and evaluation of student teachers includes identification of generic teaching competencies and a systematic appraisal with reference to established desirable teaching behaviors. Structured Classroom Observation Guides, focusing on particular skills during each week of the practicum experience and progressing from basic to complex skills throughout the course of the semester, were developed for use by student teachers' supervising teachers and university supervisors. Teaching competencies included on the Observation Guides were determined by reasonable expectations of ability to write and speak well, research findings on teacher effectiveness, established educational practice, and the educational philosophy of the college and training school site. Student teachers are observed for competency in general professionalism; gaining and holding pupil attention; using reinforcement; increasing student motivation; lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation; and leading classroom discussion. These competencies are organized in a hierarchy which reflects generally accepted assumptions on how difficult they are for student teachers to master. This report presents a discussion on the rationale for developing the Structured Observation Guides and how they are used. Samples from the Observation Guides are included that list the teaching behaviors to be observed at every level of difficulty in the hierarchy. (JD)

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OBSERVING STUDENT TEACHERS FOR A HIERARCHY OF GENERIC TEACHING SKILLS

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OBSERVING STUDENT TEACHERS FOR A HIERARCHY OF GENERIC TEACHING SKILLS

It is widely acknowledged that the effective classroom teacher must possess a wide array of knowledge, skills, and appropriate attitudes. The student teaching experience, which is common to virtually all teacher training programs, is viewed by practicing teachers, trainers of teachers, and student teachers themselves as a critical event in the making of a teacher. The practicum experience provides the student teacher with the opportunity to apply previously learned knowledge, skills, and attitudes; to develop new learnings and skills; and to receive feedback on his or her behavior. Feedback and evaluation typically come from three main sources: the pupils, the supervising teacher, and the university supervisor.

This paper describes an approach to supervision and evaluation, by both the critic teacher and the university supervisor, that includes the identification of generic teaching competencies and the systematic appraisal of student teachers with reference to the established desirable teaching behaviors. A key feature of the program is the use of structured Classroom Observation Guides that focus on particular skills each week of the practicum experience and that progress from basic to complex skills during the course of the semester and the development of the teacher's competence in teaching.

Background

The supervision and evaluation program was developed, and the Classroom Observation Guides were first used, as part of an innovative program in competency-based and field-based teacher education. The observation strategy to be described is but one feature of a comprehensive and cooperative venture in preservice teacher education entered into by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a public school system (Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools).[1] Specifically, the Classroom Observation Guides were developed for use with student teachers at Seawell Elementary School, an open-space and open-concept school, which has a faculty of 15 teachers in grades kindergarten through sixth. A total of 15 student teachers, one per regular classroom teacher, are assigned to student teach at Seawell each semester for a total of 17 weeks. In addition to student teaching per se, students are required to take nine credit hours of university course work during the practicum semester. The formal course work is concentrated in the first eight weeks of the semester with the final nine weeks devoted to full-time student teaching. But even during the initial eight weeks, student teachers spend at least two full days a week at the school site working with pupils and with supervising teachers.

Overview of the Observation and Evaluation Strategy

The approach to observation and evaluation used at Seawell incorporates all of the following beliefs:

(1) Student teaching should extend over a long enough period (17 weeks) to

permit time for gradual development of complex teaching skills.

(2) The student teaching experience should begin with a period (2 days per week for 8 weeks) when no formal observations or evaluations are made, but during which time the student can establish relationships with pupils on an individual basis, learn basic classroom routines, observe the supervising teacher, begin to try out individual and group management techniques, etc.

(3) The formal observation and evaluation program should begin by focusing on lower level teaching skills (such as ability to write on the board, project voice) and later move on to higher level skills (such as ability to plan to maximize student thinking, vary pacing of instruction).

(4) Formal evaluation should, in part, be based on a regular program of direct observation of classroom teaching behavior by both the critic teacher and the university supervisor; (formal observations should occur at least twice weekly for a minimum of 30 minutes per observation period).

(5) Desired teaching behaviors should be stated as behavioral competencies and should be explicitly communicated to the student before formal observations begin. (As required, student teachers should be given appropriate instruction and modeling to maximize the likelihood of skill acquisition and a commitment to the highest standards of teaching excellence.)

(6) Formal observations should be followed by individual conferences, and students should be given a written evaluation with reference to the predetermined competencies.

(7) Each student teacher should be allowed to develop at his or her own pace but must, nonetheless, demonstrate all of the identified competencies before the completion of the practicum experience.

Development of Classroom Observation Guides

Figure 1 shows the complete Level I Classroom Observation Guide. The Observation Guides for Levels II-V follow the same format; the component skills for Levels II-V are listed in Table 1. The selection of teaching competencies to be included on the Observation Guides was determined by one of several means:

(1) Common sense. It seemed reasonable to expect a competent teacher to: display skill in the use of the English language, know and use the students' names, be skilled in writing (manuscript and/or cursive) on the board and ditto masters, etc.

(2) Research evidence. In so far as empirical studies had identified effective teaching behaviors, research findings were incorporated into the Guides. Rosenshine (1970), for example, concludes that there is ample research to document that teacher enthusiasm (movement, gesture, variation in voice, eye contact, etc.) is positively related to student achievement. The use of reinforcement theory (positive reinforcement for desired behavior only, avoidance of continual warnings or "nagging" with no follow-through punishment, extinction to reduce disruptive attention getting behavior, etc.) has also been well established as effective in increasing productive pupil behavior and learning.

(3) Established educational practice. Many behaviors were identified that are generally believed, by professional educators, to be characteristic of good teachers and therefore desirable. For example, it is generally acccepted that teachers should possess and display a certain body of professional knowledge and skills such as the ability to state lesson objectives as

measurable learner outcomes, should evidence knowledge of content areas taught as well as knowledge of subject structure and sequence, and should use open-ended (and some higher cognitive-level) questions when leading discussions.

(4) Educational philosophy of the teacher training institution and/or training school site. Since the Observation Guides were developed for use in an open-concept school, competencies such as the following were included: establishes a pleasant feeling tone (concerned, accepting, helping); uses a variety of materials, teaching strategies, and learner activities; and encourages active student participation.

Once desired teaching behaviors had been identified, they were grouped into six main categories: general professional criteria; beginning skills in gaining and holding pupil attention; using reinforcement theory to increase learning and develop productive behavior; increasing student motivation to learn; lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation; and leading a classroom discussion. Using the method of intuition, the six groupings of competencies were organized into a hierarchy, from simple to complex, by predicted difficulty for beginning teachers to achieve. The leveled Guides, from I to V, reflect this perceived sequence. It should be noted that Level II, which focuses on using reinforcement theory, was judged to be very difficult for the preservice teacher but a necessary precondition if a student is to be expected to facilitate pupil motivation and learning (Levels III and IV).

Observing Student Teachers

Use of the Observation Guides

Each student teacher, beginning about the eighth week of the semester, is formally observed at least once a week by the critic teacher and the university supervisor. Observations by the university supervisor are for 30-60 minutes and are followed (during the same day if at all possible) by a 30 minute individual conference; students sign up in advance for an observation time and are required to submit a complete lesson plan prior to beginning the lesson to be observed.

Performance of criteria is evaluated as follows: H (Honors); P (Pass); N (Needs Improvement); U (Unsatisfactory). It is anticipated that, as a result of observation of the classroom teacher, formal instruction, and opportunity to practice, student teachers will receive a "P" for most competencies on the first observation at a given level. But the "N" rating is used freely to indicate a skill that is not yet at competency level. An "N" rating does not indicate failure but rather the need for more practice followed by reevaluation. The "H" rating is given to reflect unqualified excellence. The "U" rating is used only in the instance of a skill that has been rated "N" for several successive observations but for which improvement, to competence level, has not been demonstrated.

Should a student document the need to improve a number of skills at a given level, observation at that level is repeated the next week. Once the student has demonstrated competence in all or most of the skills at a particular level, the next observation focuses on the next higher level but includes observation for any skills that received an "N" rating for the week before. All students

are observed for Level IV skills for at least two weeks. In all, it is anticipated that each student will be formally observed six to eight times by a university supervisor. (In the case of a student who encounters real difficulty, observations may be made several times a week to increase feedback and the sense of accomplishment achieved by moving on to the next level.)

It is assumed that, in addition to formal observations by university supervisors, each student teacher will be observed frequently by his or her critic teacher in a variety of situations during each week. Most of these observations will be informal, but at least once a week the critic teacher will complete a leveled Observation Guide. It should be readily apparent that the Observation Guides are most applicable to the evaluation of a single "lesson". They do not get at many essential and complex classroom teaching behaviors such as management of contracts, learning centers, homebase, and lunch; team cooperation; planning and carrying out a unit of study; arranging a field trip, etc. A formative and summative assessment of overall competence as a classroom teahcer, one that goes beyond the individual lesson, is accomplished using a more inclusive evaluation form, "The Pod Competencies," at mid-term and end-of-semester. This form (which is grade level specific) is completed primarily by the critic teacher with limited input from the university supervisor.[2]

Conclusions

The use of the structured and leveled Classroom Observation Guides, in a regular program of observation and evaluation, is purported to have the following

advantages:

(1) The identification of generic teaching competencies allows for the use of the same sequence of Guides across subject areas; this is especially important in the supervision of elementary teachers who may be observed teaching in a variety of subject areas during the practicum.

(2) The procedure outlined allows for continuity of feedback, across evaluators, on the skills for which students are held accountable. The critic teacher and the university supervisor can discuss the student's progress in terms of an agreed upon standard; this should help to minimize the extent to which the student teacher will feel torn between two sets of expectations and standards for success. (If the university faculty supervisor works with a graduate assistant, the Guides will again provide for consistency of expectation and feedback to the student teacher.)

(3) Because they are sequenced from simple to complex--Level I to V, the use of the Guides maximizes the likelihood that student teachers will achieve initial success; this should increase their feelings of confidence and achievement and should reduce their anxiety during subsequent observations.

(4) Each Guide focuses on a different set of skills; this allows the student (especially on Levels I, II, III and V) to concentrate on a particular aspect of effective teaching while not being held accountable for other sets of skills. For example, in Level I the student is only required to "actively deal with disruptive behavior in some way"; it is not until Level II that the student is held accountable for effectively dealing with disruptive behavior. (It should be noted, however, that Levels II through V include select "carry over" skills from lower levels; lower level skills,

once demonstrated, are not then to be forgotten.)

(5) Each Guide attempts to single out, in behavioral terms, the component skills in such general areas as "gaining and holding pupil attention" and "leading a classroom discussion". Thus the Guides serve as teaching devices and diagnostic tools as well as evaluation instruments.

(6) Each Guide provides space for "Comments" so that the completed evaluation details for the student teacher how a skill was or was not demonstrated by specific reference to behaviors observed during the lesson.

(7) The Guides can be invaluable as a record of the student teacher's progress or lack there of. For example, they can be used as evidence to document that a particular student should not be allowed to continue in the practicum or should not receive a passing grade. (Since each observation is followed by an indivdual conference, during which time the student is given a carbon copy of the completed Observation Guide, the student can be expected to be aware of his or her stage of development.)

(8) Student teachers say they like the Guides. To date, the Guides have been used wih over 130 elementary student teachers, and their (anonymous) written comments have been overwhelmingly positive:

> "Very helpful! I learned a lot about myself I didn't know. I could then work on those things I wasn't aware of."
>
> "Helps to know ahead of time what is being observed."
>
> "Got steadily harder, which is good. Good visual way we have to see what's wrong or needs improvement."
>
> "Helpful for student teacher to see <u>specifically</u> what it is she/he needs work on as well as what she does well."
>
> "I liked passing off one level and then moving on to the next.

Marks of "P" and "H" worked well."

"I felt looking at them before hand helped me know what to expect and my teacher and supervisor followed the forms. That is, they observed only what was supposed to be observed that week."

"Good. Nice to know one isn't being observed on everything--all at once."

"A bit frightening at first, but definitely helpful."

"Good to have specific guide lines to go by--also good to capture elements of quality teaching."

(9) While the Guides were developed to be as specific as possible with regard to desired teaching behaviors, they are easily modified over time or school settings. In addition, the specific competencies included in the five sample guides are meant to be suggestive only; they were developed for use by a particular university supervisor and the critic teachers in one open-concept school. Through modification, addition, or deletion of the specific skills included on the Guides, this general approach to observation and supervision could be made compatible with any educational philosophy or advance in research and practice.

NOTES

1. For a description of the establishment and governance of the Seawell Project see: Lynn Curry, "Teaching centers as University/District collaboratives," Phi Delta Kappan, May, 1980, pps. 631-33.
2. A list of the "Pod Competencies" is available from the author on request.

References

Rosenshine, B. "Enthusiastic teaching: a research review," School Review, 1970, 78, 499-514.

Figure I

Seawell Elementary School Level I

Classroom Observation Guide

Student _____ Observer _____

Subject _____

Group Size _____ Time _____ Date _____ Conference Date _____

Ratings of performance criteria demonstrated:
H (Honors), P (Pass), N (Needs improvement), U (Unsatisfactory)

Professional Criteria	Comments
___ Good English usage in classroom	
___ Good articulation	
___ Good voice projection and modulation	
___ Knows and uses students' names	
___ Skill in manuscript and/or cursive (letter formation, space, size, etc.)	
Beginning Skills in Gaining and Holding Pupil Attention	
___ Variety in voice volumn and tone, rate of speaking	
___ Variety in facial and body gestures	
___ Avoids "nervous" habits (pacing floor; surplus of "OK", "Ahhh"; etc.)	
___ Maintains eye contact with class and/or individuals	
___ Listens well (does not interrupt, establishes eye contact)	
___ Level of speech appropriate for learners	
___ Establishes pleasant feeling tone (concerned, accepting, helping)	
___ Sees that pupils have space to work, can see board/chart/screen, etc.	
___ Moves about the teaching area to minimize psychological distance	
___ Deals actively with disruptive behavior in some way	

Observing Student Teachers

Table 1: Generic Teaching Skills for Levels II, III, IV, and V

Level II

Level I Skills [repeat/reobserve]

___ Good English usuage and speaking skills

___ Acceptable manuscript and/or cursive

___ Variety in gestures and voice (enthusiasm)

___ Level of speech appropriate for learners

Using Reinforcement Theory to Increase Learning and Develop Productive Behavior

___ Uses positive reinforcement immediately after desired behavior

___ Uses positive reinforcement for behaviors that may only approximate the ideal (at first)

___ Uses positive reinforcement for desired behaviors only

___ Selects appropriate and effective reinforcers for student or group

___ Is specific in reinforcing a behavior ("Good job, you finished on time")

___ Uses a variety of verbal and non-verbal positive reinforcers as well as special privileges, etc.

___ Ignores behavior that is merely attention getting (extinction)

___ Uses a warning or Punishment II (time out, etc.) for undesirable behavior that cannot be ignored

___ Uses non-verbal disapproval before resorting to verbal warning

___ Uses a variety of warning phrases and Punishment II options

___ Avoids "nagging" (continual warning with no follow through Punishment II)

___ Gives positive reinforcement for desirable behavior as soon as possible after expression of disapproval

___ Avoids sex/race/etc. bias

Level III

Level I and II Skills [repeat/reobserve]

___ Displays enthusiasm

___ Acceptable manuscript and/or cursive

___ Uses reinforcement theory effectively

Increasing Student Motivation to Learn

___ Gets students' attention before beginning lesson

___ Uses method of introducing lesson that is interesting in itself

___ Uses method of introducing lesson that helps students to become interested in the main part of the lesson

___ Uses a variety of materials (charts, books, films, pictures)

___ Uses a variety of teaching strategies

___ Uses a variety of learner activities

___ Uses examples that are interesting and relevant for the group

___ Stresses important points by gestures (pointing), words ("Listen carefully"), or repetition

___ Gives clear and complete directions (using a minimum of words)

___ Provides for immediate feedback on student performance

___ Uses positive reinforcement frequently

___ Avoids race/sex/etc. bias

Level IV

Level I, II, and III Skills [repeat/reobserve]
(Observe for selected skills from Levels I and II as well as all criteria on Level III)

Lesson Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation

___ Valid/appropriate lesson objectives

___ Variety of objectives (knowledge, skills, attitudes)

___ Objectives stated as measurable learner outcomes

___ Uses 7-step lesson plan appropriately (set, goals, input, model, check understanding, guided practice, independent practice)

___ Plans to maximize student thinking

___ Begins lesson on time (minimizes transition time)

___ Has all materials and resources ready

___ Knowledgeable in subject area

___ Knowledge of subject structure and sequence

___ Varies pacing of instruction

___ Good sense of student interest span

___ Encourages active student participation

___ Encourages learner questions, responses, and expressions

___ Provides for participation and learning by all ability levels

___ Exhibits flexibility and resourcefulness

___ Provides for peer group interaction

___ Avoids sex/race/etc. bias

___ Concludes with summary of main points of lesson

___ Encourages sense of achievement by group at conclusion of lesson

___ Evaluates to determine if objectives have been reached

Level V

Level I-IV Skills. [repeat/reobserve selected skills as needed]

Leading a Classroom Discussion

___ Uses opening question(s) that gains students' interest

___ Uses opening question(s) that establishes focus for discussion

___ Knowledgeable in subject area

___ Displays enthusiasm for content area

___ Asks coherent questions at learners' ability level

___ Uses a variety of lower-order and higher-order questions

___ Asks open-ended questions (avoids yes/no and multiple choice questions)

___ Uses probing questions to enhance student thinking ("How", "Why", "Can you be more specific")

___ Uses silence to encourage thinking ("wait time" of 3-5 seconds)

___ Displays skill in maintaining focus of discussion (avoids lengthy digressions)

___ Uses verbal and non-verbal positive reinforcement frequently

___ Uses positive reinforcement for "correct" portion of partially correct response

___ Uses a variety of reinforces (not just a few pat phrases)

___ Can correct an incorrect response without damage to student's ego

___ Listens well to student responses (eye contact, not interrupt)

___ Encourages participation by all students

Observing Student Teachers

___ Provides opportunities for students to ask questions

___ Paces lesson to maximize student interest and learning

___ Avoids race/sex/etc. bias

___ Concludes with summary of main points of discussion